

M^r Prichard Coll^d 21
11853. aa. 28.

REMARKS

O N

Mr. MASON'S ELFRIDA,

I N

LETTERS to a FRIEND.

Πρὸς μὲν οὖν τοῖς εἰωθότας χλευάζειν τὰ παρα-
γέλιμα τῶν Τεχνῶν, ταῦτα εἰρήσθω.

Dionys. Halic. περὶ συνθ. τμημ. κέ.

— *Ad exemplar veteris Tragediæ ita scriptam,
ut esse quandoque possit Exemplar. Plin. Epist.*



L O N D O N:

Printed for J. and R. TONSON and S. DRAPER
in the Strand: And sold by J. ROBERTS in
Warwick-Lane.

M DCC LII.

[Price 1 s.]

REMARKS

ON

THE ALABAMA

IN THE GULF OF MEXICO



NO. 10

Printed by J. G. & J. H. Smith, 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

1864



LETTER I.

S I R,

AS you desired me, in a Letter or two ago, to send you my Thoughts on Mr. *Mason's Elfrida*, which you then heard was soon to be made public, I have, since the Publication of it, been reading and examining it with that View: I have, I say, been reading it, studying it, looking it over and over; and in truth find myself so uncommonly pleased with the Performance, that I can hardly prevail with myself to lay it aside out of my Hands, though it is to take up my Pen, and still to dwell on the agreeable Subject, by writing to you in commendation of it.

I shall pursue the same Method in giving you my Thoughts on this Poem, which I myself observed in examining it.

When we speak of good Writing in general, we comprehend under that Idea (which is a very complex one) 1. The Subject Matter. 2. The improving these Materials, the digesting 'em, and putting 'em well together. 3. The Sentiments,

ments, and Expression made use of. The first may be compared to the scattered disjointed Bones of a Carcase; the second is like the arranging them in due form, and with a proper Contexture compleating the Skeleton; the third is clothing this Skeleton, as it were, with Sinews and Flesh, and then giving the Body the Colouring of Complexion. Now under the first of these Heads naturally comes the *Fable* of the Drama; under the second, the Management of Incidents, *the Disposition of Acts and Scenes*; under the third and last fall the *Sentiment, Diction, and Versification*, which finish and colour the whole. [As to the particular Plan, on which this Poem before us is built, it being a Subject so often, and so well already handled, I shall only speak of it occasionally in the course of my Remarks.]

This Division I shall follow in considering the Piece in hand, as it seems to be a plain, clear, and easy Method of judging distinctly, accurately, and precisely of it, and appears to be the best way I can take, in order to point out to you its several Beauties, which I should be glad to do as explicitly as possible.

First then of the *Fable* of *Elfrida*, in which I shall consider not only the Story itself, but the Persons also concerned in it, and their *Characters*, or Manners. Now the Fable you will find to be strictly agreeable to the Rules of *Aristotle*. I need not mention its having the grand Unity of Action: It has likewise the Advantage of having great Personages for Actors in it, to make it *important*, and answerable to the Dignity of Tragedy; and at the same Time it is so far domestic, as to be closely in-
teresting

interesting and affecting to the private Reader. I would have you take the Word *domestic* here in the same Sense, in which the Fable of *the Orphan* may be called a domestic one, in as much as it is taken from common Life. Our Story too is more particularly *interesting* to an *English* Reader on another account; since in choosing it the Poet has observed, what *Horace* said,

Celebrare domestica facta,

has founded his Drama on a Fact taken out of the History of our own Isle. The peculiar partial Fondness for our *natale solum* is of so extensive an Influence, as to make us always read with a personal Concernment, and fond Attention, an account of any Thing, however insignificant, that relates to it; although, by great Distance of Time, and an utter Detachment of Interests, it may, in reality, no more concern us, than what passed three thousand Years ago in *China*. For this Reason it is, that an *Imogen*, an *Elfrida*, or even a *Jane Shore*, will always engage and affect us more than a *Cleopatra*, or an *Almeria*. That this is a great Beauty in the Fable of *Elfrida*, you will the more plainly see, if you read what a very sensible and ingenious Author, who has lately published a Commentary, and Notes on *Horace's Opera Critica*, has remark'd on the 286th Ver. of the *Ars Poetica*. Our Author, however, as a Poet is always Master of his own Subject, has not taken his Story, just as the Historian gave it him; but has made some Alterations in it, which I am sure you will think very judicious, and tacitly thank him for. In a former Letter,

you remember, I stated the Story to you, as it occurs in our Annals; which tell us that *Elfrida*, on the Death of *Athelwold*, married *Edgar* without shewing any extraordinary Regret for the Loss of her former Lord, or any great Reluctance in accepting *Edgar* for her second. Now this Part of the Story our Poet has varied, to make the Character of his Heroine a perfect one; and by this too had the Opportunity of closing his Drama in that striking and solemn Manner in which he has, where she makes that Vow of Widowhood, and of *professing* herself in those beautiful and awful Lines.

Chorus.

— bear, *Angels*, bear —
Elfrida.

*Hear first, that Athelwold's sad Widow swears
To rear a ballow'd Convent o'er the Place,
Where stream'd his Blood; there will she weep
thro' Life,*

*Immur'd with this chaste Throng of Virgins; there
Each Day shall six times bear her full-voic'd Choir
Chaunt the slow Requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord;
There too, when Midnight lours with awful gloom,
She'll rise observant of the stated Call
Of waking Grief, bear the dim livid Taper
Along the winding Isles, and at the Altar
Kiss every pale Shrine with her trembling Lips,
Press the cold Stone with her bent Knee, and call
On sainted Athelwold.*

*Hear next, that Athelwold's sad Widow swears
Never to violate the holy Vow
She to his Truth first plighted; swears to bear
The sober singleness of Widowhood
To her cold Grave, &c.*

Pray,

Pray, can you read these Verses without somewhat of a reverential Emotion? Or can you shew me any better Lines on the same Subject in *Pope's Eloisa*? But this is incroaching on, and anticipating what I intend to consider under my third Head. To return to our Fable: It appears to be a *simple* One, if compared with the Perplexity of most of those, which are the Subjects of our *English* Plays; but it is in reality an *implex* one (to which *Aristotle* gives the Preference before the *simple* one in Tragedy) and in this respect is manifestly superior to the Fable of the *Agonistes*. Lastly, to compleat the Excellence of the Fable, the Moral inculcated by it is plainly no other, no less than that important general Maxim, a *strict Observation of Truth*; on which alone is founded (according to our great * Metaphysician) all Morality and natural Religion.

Under this Head of the Fable, I intend to consider also the Persons concern'd in it, and their *Characters*. In the Characters now of a good Tragedy, there should be, 1. *Dignity*. 2. *Variety*, and 3. as far as possible *Novelty*, and 4. particularly *Consistency*. The Persons too 5. should be all active, and bear a close Relation to the main Piece: If they do not, they are unnecessary and impertinent; they are so many Excrecencies: *Eminent expresse* (as *Petronius* strongly terms it) *extra corpus Orationis*: they are embossed, whereas every thing that is introduced and made part of any Composition, should be enamel'd. I am the more particular on this last Article, as it is a Thing which has been but little regarded by our most

* Mr. *Wollaston*.

eminent Authors, and that too in some of our
 best Plays, particularly our Comedies ; where
 you will frequently find a Character in one Play,
 which might be very well spared without dis-
 figuring or disjointing the Plot, and be with
 equal Propriety interwove in any other Play
 whatever. This is what swells the List of our
Dramatis Personæ, and makes 'em amount to
 double, sometimes treble the Number, you
 meet with on the *Greek Stage*. Now whether
 we consider the Characters of *Elfrida* in any of
 the foregoing Lights, we shall find them un-
 exceptionably excellent. They are *considerable*
 ones, they are *diversified*, one of them *new*,
 all *consistent*, all *pertinent*. There is something
 new and particular in *Atbelwold* : The shadowy
 and luminous Parts, in this Picture, are finely
 intermixt ; you find he has been guilty of rank
 and base Treachery, and yet discover at bottom
 such Seeds of Probity and Honour in him, as
 endear him to you with all his Faults, and
 oblige you to be compassionately touched with
 his virtuous Remorse and Self-Accusation. That
 of *Elfrida* cannot be sufficiently admir'd, as
 being a shining Pattern of every thing that is
 truly amiable and excellent in Woman ; of a
 consummate Modesty, Diffidence and Blindness
 to her own Charms ; a sweet Tenderneſs of Soul
 and Forgivingneſs of Temper ; and laſtly, of an
 unambitious and moſt unalterable nuptial Con-
 ſtancy, and ſteady attachment to the *Perſon*,
 and *Memory* of her Lord. In *Orgar* we have
 an old Nobleman of a choleric, violent, and
 impetuous Spirit, of a churliſh Pride and Pre-
 ſumption on the Antiquity of his Houſe, *full*
of ſtrange Oaths (as *Shakeſpear* has it) *jealous in*
Honour

Honour, sudden and quick in Quarrel. In *Edgar* we have a lively Portrait of an amorous, gallant, courteous and truly generous Prince. Even *Edwin*, though the Messenger and a Servant only, we must consider as no ordinary Person; since we find that *Atbelwold* makes no Scruple of disclosing the important Secret in his Presence. The Introduction of the Virgins, who compose the *Chorus* (of which somewhat farther in another Place) is not only proper, as agreeable to his Purpose, which professedly was to write on the Model of the *Greek* Tragedy; but considered relatively to the Piece itself is altogether indispensably necessary. For we cannot suppose *Elfrida* left in that Manner, in which she is described to be, without some such female Attendants. The *Chorus* then is not annexed to, but naturally rises out of the Subject. That their Character is such, as it ought to be (what that is, is best seen in *Horace's Ars Poet.* from Vers. 193 to 202) and that it is kept up all along consistent with itself, will appear to any one that casts his Eyes over the Part, which it bears, both in the Dialogue and in the Interludes. To what I have said here concerning the Persons and *Manners*, I cannot help adding an incomparable Observation of *Aristotle*, as quoted by Mr. *Addison*, and which you will easily apply to *Atbelwold's* Character as drawn by our Poet. ‘ If a Man (says he) of perfect and consummate Virtue falls into a Misfortune, it raises our Pity, but not our Terror; because we do not fear that it may be our own case, who do not resemble the suffering Person. But if we see a Man of Virtue mixt with Infirmities, fall into any Misfortune, it
‘ does

‘ does not only raise our Pity, but our Terror ;
 ‘ because we are afraid that the like Misfortunes
 ‘ may happen to ourselves, who resemble the
 ‘ Character of the suffering Person.’ If what
Aristotle has here observed is just, with what
 Judgment and Sense has our Poet painted *Atbel-*
wold's Character, fully to answer at once the
 two great Ends, which Tragedy has in view,
 namely, *to raise our Pity and our Terror ?*

As to consistency of Character, I have heard
 something like an Objection made to the Beha-
 viour of the Chorus, in giving Shelter to *Orgar*,
 contrary to the strict Interdict of *Atbelwold*.
 This however, I think, the Poet has himself
 very satisfactorily obviated at the End of the
 Scene, by saying,

— *When pale Distress*
Implores your aiding Hand,
Let not a partial Faithfulness,
Let not a Mortal's vain Command
Urge you to break th' unalterable Laws
Of Heav'n-descended Charity.
Ab ! follow still the soft-ey'd Deity.

The Word *partial* if you duly weigh, and
 accordingly take a full and comprehensive View
 of the Case with all its Circumstances, consider
 that it is part of the Character of the Chorus, to
 have Compassion on the distress'd, that the Chorus
 here actually does *tegit commissa*, keeps a most cau-
 tious and religious Silence in not satisfying the En-
 quiries of *Orgar* ; and reconciles in some measure
 the two opposite Duties of Fidelity and Charity,
 by sheltering him in a Bower detached from the

* — *Deosque precetur, & oret*
Ut redeat miseris fortuna,

Hor. Ars Poet.
 Castle,

Castle, and not giving him entrance within the Gates, to which we find that the Earl's Prohibition extended; if you, I say, consider all this, you will not, I believe, take any Exception to the Behaviour of the Chorus, but think it conducted and squared according to the most precise Rules of the nicest Casuistry.

In my next, I purpose to consider what comes under the second Head of my first Division.



LETTER II.

UNDER the second Head is to be considered the Poet's improving and enriching the Fable with additional Incidents, the Management of them in the Disposition of his Acts and Scenes, and thus settling, as it were, the Constitution of the Poem: Which though it may cost the Composer more Pains than any Part of his Work, and contain very essential Beauties; yet they are frequently latent ones and escape the common Eye; as do the Ligaments and Contexture of the Muscles and Bones in the human Body; though they are as remarkable or even more extraordinary Instances and Proofs, than any, of the Wisdom and Art of the Almighty Contriver of the human Frame. Thus, I say, the Construction of the Drama, the Conduct of the Piece through its several Parts; the diversifying it with Incidents, and these though surprising, yet naturally dependent on,
and

and seemingly growing one out of the other ; each in the former Part of the Play imperceptibly tending to the unravelling the Plot, and after that as easily and naturally bringing about the Catastrophe, or winding up of the Whole ; the adjusting, and arranging the Circumstances of a Piece thus properly, shews the greatest Skill of a Poet, though it does not display it to every common Eye. Now to examine *Elfrida* in this view. — How judiciously is *Orgar* first introduced ! How artfully does the Poet here provide for three Things together ; first, for making the Spectators acquainted with as much of the Story, as is necessary for them then to know, which no one could be more capable of, or more proper to explain to them, than *Orgar* ; secondly, for a most beautiful melancholy Tale, so agreeable to the Genius of Tragedy ; which, thirdly, at the same time tends artfully and easily to the unravelling the Story. What can be more simple, and at the same time better contrived, than to make *Elfrida* come and hold Converse with the Chorus, and presently *Athelwold* meet her in that Place, where every thing that passes is overheard by *Orgar* ? The same may be said of the accidental Arrival of *Edwin* at the same Place, whose Message disturbing *Athelwold*, leads him of course into explaining the Cause of his present Confusion to *Elfrida*, and at the same time to *Orgar* ; whose overhearing it is excellently contrived to baffle the Design of *Elfrida*'s Disguise, which had in some measure calmed the Fears of *Athelwold*. Thus then you see how well *Athelwold*'s Safety is counterwork'd. Distress, I take it, is then most heightened, when it overtakes a Person,
and

and the Prospect all at once darkens on him, after his having had a clear and fair one, and had Reason to think that the Storm was overblown. In this manner you find the Pathos improved in the present Instance, by the Poet's making *Athelwold*, with his Doubts and Uneasiness a little cleared up, rest on an ill-grounded Security, founded on the Hopes of *Elfrida*'s Disguise preventing a Discovery, just before he is discovered. And in the same way it is heightened soon after, where *Elfrida* receives the News of *Athelwold*'s Death, after her Grievs had been somewhat alleviated by *Edgar*'s seemingly accorded Pardon. [Just so, if you remember, in *Sophocles*' *Ajax*, *Tecmessa*'s Distress is worked up to a higher Pitch, by the Death of *Ajax*, as he had given her Reason just before to think, that he had changed his Resolution, and laid aside all Thoughts of dispatching himself.] Then again as to this Pardon, which does in some measure ease *Elfrida*; with propriety to make *Edgar*, so inflamed as he was, seemingly comply with her earnest Petitions, how artfully does the Poet suggest the Thoughts of a Duel to the King, by making him naturally catch the Hint of it from *Athelwold*'s Words,

— *this ready Sword*
Shall expiate all.

the Execution of which Purpose is as naturally and easily brought about by the Hunting, on which account *Edgar* first came to *Harewood*; which again with equal Propriety produces those Incidents which close the Piece. It might have been expected perhaps, that *Elfrida*, upon receiving the Account of *Athelwold*'s Death, should

should have taken the usual Tragic leave of the Spectators, by performing some Act of Butchery on herself — No, that would have been, and ever is inconsistent with a perfect Character, as that of *Elfrida* is here, who is represented as a Woman of Sense, Virtue and Piety, among her other Qualities. To maintain the Consistency of Character, as she is all along drawn as a Person of Piety, and unshaken connubial Constancy, in what manner could the Poet better dispose of her, than by making her retire to a Convent of her own founding, there to dedicate the Remainder of her Days to the Worship of God, and the Lamentation of her deceased Lord?

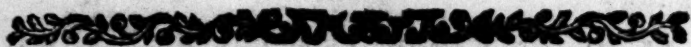
And now, on the whole, as to the Management of Acts and Scenes, do not you think that the Incidents and Circumstances, with which the Fable is filled, are likewise various and intricate enough to entertain even the common Reader, and to qualify it for the *English* Stage? This Intricacy however, you see, does not arise from shuffling together and involving a parcel of strange improbable Circumstances and Events, in the manner of our common Play-Writers, who thicken and embarrass their Story, till it is more like a Nest of *Indian* hollow Balls, than any thing that comes out of the Hands of an *European* Workman; the Intricacy, I say, of the Piece before us does not proceed from such an absurd laboured Perplexity of a Number of motly Incidents huddled and unnaturally jumbled together; but naturally and easily results from the Story itself. And do not you think that the Distress is sufficiently worked up, deeply to affect the Passions, though most of the *Dramatis Personæ* do not cut

cut one another's Throats in the course of the Drama?

As to the Chorus, even supposing it was not essential to the Drama in general (which however every one, that considers what is said on that Head in the Author's Letters prefixed to the Poem, and what by the Critic, whom I mentioned before, on the 193d Line of *Horace's Ars Poet.* must readily allow) even, I say, if it did not enter into the Essence of a Piece, you must, however, without Dispute grant it is highly serviceable and ornamental as it stands at present, and makes Part of this Poem: Which I shall make you the more sensible of, when I come to speak of our Author's *Sentiment, Expression, &c.*

On the Subject of the Chorus making the Drama a *continued* Piece by its Interludes, I will here give you a handsome Passage from an ingenious modern *French* Author, much in favour of the Chorus, though the Author is no great Friend to it. His Words are these, '*Le Chant Lyrique du Chœur exprimoit dans les entr'actes les mouvemens excités par l'acte qui venoit de finir. Le Spectateur ému en prenoit aisément l'unisson, & se préparoit ainsi à recevoir l'impression des Actes suivans; au lieu qu'aujourd'hui le violon ne semble fait que pour guérir l'âme de sa blessure, & éteindre le feu qui s'allumoit.*—Les Beaux Arts red. à un Principe par Mr. *Batteux.*

LETTER



L E T T E R I I I .

I proceed now under my third Head to speak of the *Sentiments, Diction* and *Verseification* of our Poem. The Sentiments of a well wrote Tragedy should be, 1. *Just* (which indeed is common to Tragedy with all good Writing) 2. *Grand*, never unsuitable to that Dignity which is peculiar to this Species of Poetry; 3. Addressed so as to strike home on the *Passions*. Let us see now whether our Author's Sentiments are not excellent, according to this Idea of Tragic Sentiment; and whether I cannot produce Instances to convince you of it: though the pathetic ones cannot so well be pointed out in particular Passages, as seen and felt by the Reader, as they run through the whole Poem, which is animated throughout with a peculiar Spirit of Tendernefs. The Passion, to which our Poet has chiefly addressed himself, is Pity (to which indeed most of the Tragedians since *Æschylus* have generally directed their Pieces) and in this he has taken not so much *Sophocles*, as *Euripides* for his Master; part of whose Character, as *Longinus* has given it, is this, φιλοπονῶτατ' Ἐρωίας ἐκτραγῶδῆσαι, καὶ τοῦτω ἐπιτυχίστατ' [Sect. 15.] *that he laid himself out most, and that with the greatest Success on Subjects of Love*. Which Subjects of all others, the most naturally lead a Writer into,

into the τὸ ἐλεεινόν, the *tender* and *pitiable*, and thus give him the best Opportunity of touching the softest Passions of the human Heart. Accordingly *Quintilian* speaking of *Euripides*, says, In affectibus, qui *Miseratione* constant faciliè præcipuus [lib. 10. c. 1.] which Character of him, as given by the *Latin* Critick, does in effect consequently result from that which is given of him by the *Greek* one. And what Opinion *Aristotle* had of this Excellence in a Tragedian, you may gather from what he says of *Euripides*. He calls him τραγικώτατος τῶν ποιητῶν [Poet. Sect. 13.] from whence it may be well concluded, I think, that he look'd on *Pity*, as the Passion, to which Tragedy ought principally to be directed, as it is in a masterly Manner by our Poet. Not but in some Places he alarms us, and excites our *Terror*; as in that, where *Athelwold's* desponding Heart misgives him.

*The giddy Height of Joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging Rock, at whose low Foot
The black and beating Surge of Infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and sink my Soul.*

In that too of the Chorus, deterring *Athelwold* when he talked of dispatching himself,

——— *Forbear, forbear :
Think what a Sea of deep Perdition whelms
The Wretch's trembling Soul, who lanches forth
Unlicens'd to Eternity*———

There is something too very horrid in *Elfrida's* first Speech on hearing the News of *Athelwold's* Death: as likewise in the following Passage

B

Orgar.

Orgar.

—— Go in, my Child,
And seek Tranquillity ——
Elfrida.

—— And seek Tranquillity !

*Ab ! who will lead me to her darkling Cell ?
I know her now, she is Death's pale-ey'd Sister ;
Her Mansion is the murky charnel Vault,
Whence oft at midnight by the Moon's pale Gleam
She sees the neighb'ring Sexton with his Spade
Upturn the green Swerd, delving the dank Grave
Of some love-stricken Maid — Yes, lead me thither.*

On this Subject of Sentiment I must observe, with what extraordinary Spirit, at the same time with what ease the Dialogue is carried on throughout.

I shall now produce some Instances of fine Sentiment, where the Passions are not immediately concern'd, to show you that our Author's are such, as are mention'd in the Beginning of my Letter. But before I cite any Passage farther, let it be observ'd once for all, that any Quotation from a dramatic Poem must appear to great disadvantage, and by being detach'd from the Dialogue lose all that Beauty, which it receives from the Place in which it stands. However, under these Disadvantages, I doubt not but I can bring Instances of Sentiment, which you will think truly admirable. What say you to that in these Lines ?

—— We know,

*There oft is found an avarice in Grief ;
And the wan Eye of Sorrow loves to gaze
Upon its secret board of treasur'd Woes
In pining Solitude ——*

Is

Is not that a fine Sentiment, where the Chorus speaking in Praise of their Lord, and of the Honours and Favours which *Edgar* loaded him with, says that the Earl receiv'd them all

*As does the golden Censer Frankincense,
Only to spread a sacred Gale of Blessings
Thro' all the Realm.*

and that of the Chorus cautioning *Elfrida* to be aware of Jealousy

—— See, *Elfrida*,

*Ab! see, how round yon branching Elm the Ivy
Twines its green Chain, and poisons what supports it,
Not less injurious to the blooming Shoots
Of growing Love is sickly Jealousy.*

As likewise that express'd in the following Lines, where *Elfrida*, looking on the Flower, which she had just gathered with a Design of staining her Complexion with the Juice of it, says,

*'Tis strange, my Virgins, this sweet Child of
Summer,
Silken and soft, whose Breath perfumes the Air,
Whose gay Vest paints the Morn, should in its
Bosom*

*Hide such Pollution — Yet, 'tis often thus :
All are not as they seem ———*

You undoubtedly will think this a fine Passage; but however beautiful it may here appear, as it certainly does, yet it loses a considerable Beauty, which it has, as it stands in the Poem, by respecting the Disguise of *Orgar*. There is something very grand and truly sublime in the following Passage, where the Chorus dissuades *Orgar* from Revenge.

*Dare to Revenge? No, Sir; in highest Heav'n
Vengeance 'midst Storms and Tempests sits insbrin'd,
Vested in Robes of Lightning, and there sleeps,
Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's Call.
O let not Man presume to take unbid
That dread Vicegerency——*

I might produce the whole Ode on *Truth* as an Instance of fine Sentiment. Take what immediately follows that, as one, where *Athekwold*, on whom we are to suppose during the preceding Interlude, *Edgar* had pronounc'd Sentence of Banishment, comes out and says,

*Banish me! No. I'll die. For why should Life
Remain a lonely Lodger in that Breast,
Which Honour leaves untenanted?*

The following one seems to be conceiv'd altogether in the Spirit of *Milton*, and to have requir'd the greatest Strength of Fancy.

*The Race of Man is one vast marshall'd Army,
Whose numerous Squadrons fill the Plains of Time,
Their Leader the Almighty. High in Air
That chos'n Archangel rides, whose Right-Hand
wields*

*The imperial Standard of his Providence,
Which dreadly sweeping thro' the vaulted Sky,
O'ershadows all Creation.*

You must, I am certain, admire that of *Elfrida* intreating *Edgar* in behalf of her sentenc'd Lord,

—— O flinty *Edgar*,
*What! will this Penitence not move thee? Know
There is a rose-lip'd Seraph sits on high,
Who ever bends his holy Ear to Earth
To mark the Voice of Penitence, to catch*

Her

*Her solemn Sighs, to tune them to his Harp,
And echo them in Harmonies divine
Up to the Throne of Grace. Ev'n Heav'n is won
By Penitence, and shall Heav'n's Substitute,
Shall Edgar scorn ———*

There is something so peculiar and original in that of the Chorus, advising *Elfrida* to endeavour to calm her Father, who had retir'd in gloomy Resentment, that I must quote it.

*At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his Revenge. For Solitude,
Which soothes the tranquil Mind, has dread effects
On wrathful Breasts. The same sequester'd Pine,
Which veils the gurgling Ring-dove with its
Boughs,
Whets with its knotty Trunk the Boar's vent Tooth,
And points each fang with Death ———*

There are numberless other Instances which might be given, which would exceed the Limits of my Paper: These are sufficient to convince you of the Excellence of our Author's Sentiments. But before I have done with this Subject, it would be improper not to take notice of the *Purity* of them in point of Moral; which is throughout so very extraordinary, that were *Plato* now alive, I am persuaded he would venture to give Mr. *Mason*, with all his Poetry, a Place in his Republic.



LETTER IV.

HAVING dispatch'd in my former Letter the Business of Sentiment, I come in this to that of the *Expression*, and *Verseification* of our Play consider'd as a Poem. The Beauty of Expression, according to my Idea of it, consists first in its being *perspicuous*; then, *ornamented* in such a Manner as to distinguish it from the vulgar and prosaic Stile: But then these Ornaments must be either sparingly or profusely laid on according to the Thing treated of. Therefore, though the Language must be all along Poetic, it must, however, be judiciously *varied*, and embellished conformably to the Nature of the Subject. This last Propriety of Stile you cannot help taking notice of in our Author, if you but just compare the Ode or interlude Part with the Dialogue. That the Language of our Poet has Perspicuity the first essential Quality of Diction, every one, I affirm it, must own, that can read. His is exactly that Language, which *Lucian* has characteriz'd as the best, such *ὡς μὲν τοὺς πολλοὺς συνίεναι, τοὺς δὲ πεπαιδευμένους ἐπαινέσαι* [*πὼς δὲ Ἰσὼρ. συγγράφειν.*] *that the Many may understand it, and the Few admire it.* That Mr. *Mason's* Expression is widely distinguish'd from the ordinary Forms of Speech, I can bring a strong Proof from the second Page, where a common Thought is express'd in the following Manner,

Borrowing

*Borrowing Disguises, till inventive Art
Can scarce supply him with variety.*

It shows certainly the greatest Force and richness of Expression, to be able to raise an ordinary Thought, and give it all the Grandeur and Solemnity of Poetry, merely by the Manner in which it is express'd. *Virgil* himself acknowledg'd this Difficulty, and with all the poetic Verbage he was master of, own'd

— *verbis ea vincere magnum*

Quàm sit, & angustis hunc addere rebus bono-
rem. Georg.

And yet we see with what extraordinary Success our Poet has got over this Difficulty. This is remarkable however, in no Part of his whole Piece more than in the moral Sentences of the Chorus, which in the *Greek* Poets are frequently deliver'd in such a naked and bare Manner, that if you strip them of their Metre, they are as unpoetical, as the moral Scraps, the proverbial sententious γνῶμαι that are to be met with up and down *Diogenes Laertius*. A Proof of what I say here concerning Mr. *Mason's* Expression in his Chorus, is that inimitable Passage about Vengeance, mentioned in a former Letter: As likewise this,

— *for well we know,*

*Fidelity's the best, and fairest Wreath,
That can adorn a Servant's Brow —*

Thus too common Observations, put in the Mouth of the Chorus, receive an Air of Dignity from the Embellishments of our Author. Thus that, which I have quoted before, on Jealousy's poisoning Love: And this,

— Does her fair Form require
The Blazon of rich Vesture? Genuine Beauty
Nor asks, nor needs it: Negligence alone
Is its bright Diadem, and artless Ease
Its Robe of Tyrian Tincture—

That too on Pleasure,

The Youth, who bathes in Pleasure's limpid Stream
At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his Soul
Nerv'd with recruited Strength; but if too oft
He swims in sportive Mazes thro' the Flood,
It chills his languid Virtue—

How finely is express'd the Uneasiness of Suspense!

Suspense! thou frozen Guest be gone!
The Wretch, whose rugged Bed
Is lin'd with Thorns, more softly rests his Head,
Than he who sinks amid the Cygnet's Down,
If thou tormenting Feind be nigh,
To prompt his starting Tear, his ceaseless Sigh,
His Wish, his Pray'r, his Vow for ling'ring Certainty.

How finely the Anguish, which an ingenuous Mind feels from the Sense of Guilt!

— Edwin, 'tis ever thus
With noble Minds, if chance they slide to Folly;
Remorse stings deeper, and relentless Conscience
Pours more of Gall into the bitter Cup
Of their severe Repentance —

These are no more than ordinary moral Remarks put in the Mouth of the Chorus occasionally, and yet you see in what an uncommon

mon Light they appear as they are ornamented by our Poet.

But not to dwell any longer on the Expression in the moral Part of the Chorus (which, however, to support with Dignity is the most *trying* Part of Diction, and in which I may safely venture to say he has far excelled his Masters the *Greeks*) let us proceed to consider and point out the several Instances of beautiful Expression in the Body of the Poem. That however we cannot well do: The whole Piece is so thick set with Beauties of this Kind, that it would be endless to enumerate each severally; it would be well nigh to transcribe the whole. Let us content ourselves then at present with taking a View of the most glaring ones, reserving the Consideration of others for my next Letter; in which I intend to go regularly thro' the Poem, and point out its various Beauties, as they occur in the course of it.

All those Passages, which I have produc'd to you before as Instances of fine Sentiment, might be justly quoted as so many of fine Expression; but to produce some others — Our Poet seems to have employ'd on some of the following Passages the whole Energy of our Tongue: As, on this, where *Orgar* complimenting the Chorus says,

*I meant not rudeness, tho' I dar'd to listen;
For ah! what Ear so fortified and barr'd
Against the tuneful Force of vocal Charms,
But would with transport to such sweet Assailants
Surrender its attention? Never yet
Have I past by the Night-bird's custom'd Spray,
What time she pours her wild and artless Song,
Without attentive Pause, and silent Rapture;
How*

*How could I then, with savage Disregard,
Hear Voices tun'd by nature sweet as hers,
Grac'd with all Art's Addition?*

You must perceive how, in all Parts of his Poem, whenever he lights on the Subject of Music, he particularly lays himself out upon that in the sweetest Manner: Witness those Lines, just cited, as likewise these,

*And as amid the sprightly-swelling Strain
Of dulcet Notes, that breathe
From Flute, or Lyre,
The deep Base rolls its manly Melody,
Guiding the tuneful Choir;
So thou, Humanity, shall lead along
Th' accordant Passions in their moral Song,
And give our mental Concert truest Harmony.*

I can't help adding at length this Passage too.

————— *Mean while, my Friends,
Tune some harmonious Lay, whose melting Notes
Flow in such sprightly descant as may speed
The lazy Hours, that now move slowly on
With dull and flagging Pinion. For sweet Music
Has got a magic Spell to aid their Flight,
And make them skim through their diurnal round
Swift as the Swallow circles.*

Is not the Expression of the following Verses admirable?

————— *O my Virgins,
With what a leaden, and retarding weight,
Does Expectation load the Wings of Time?
How have these three dull Hours crept languid on,
Since first the crimson Mantle of the Morn
Skirted yon gay horizon?*

Can

Can any thing be more finely express'd, than this
of *Elfrida*,

—— *I will stoop my Head,
Drawl out an idiot Phrase, and do each act
With e'en a rude and peasant Awkwardness.*

Or this of *Athelwold*,

*Now must that unstain'd Virgin Character
Be doom'd to gross and hourly Prostitution
Sating the Lust of Slander* ——

I might with Propriety here transcribe all his
lyric Interludes, as Instances of fine Expression,
as they are throughout embellish'd with all the
Graces that the *English* Tongue can bestow up-
on them.

His *descriptive*, and purely picturesque Parts
are painted in as strong and vivid Colours, as
in any Poet that I know. When I am reading
his lively Transcripts of those pleasing Scenes
of Nature, which he has presented to our view,
I fancy myself in *Adam's* situation in *Milton*.

—— *About me round I see
Hill, Dale, and shady Woods, and sunny Plains,
And liquid Lapse of murmuring Streams; by these,
Creatures that live, and move, and walk, or fly,
Birds on the Branches warbling: All Things smile:
With Fragrance and with Joy my Heart o'erflows.*

Book viii.

Do not you actually see, what is pictur'd out
in the following Lines?

*Hie thee, poor Pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring Bow'r,
O'er which an old Oak spreads his awful Arm,
Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath
The Ivy, gadding from th' untwisted stem,
Curtains ach verdant Side.*

Do

Do you not plainly descry,

——— *yon Deer,*
That just their Antlers forth in sportive fray ?

Have you not a distinct View of the Goddess's Content, as she is represented in the following posture and situation ?

*There, Goddess, on the shaggy Mound,
 Where tumbling Torrents roar around,
 Where pendent Mountains o'er your Head
 Stretch their formidable Shade ;
 You listen, while the holy Seer
 Slowly chaunts his Vespers clear, &c.*

It would be needless to observe that our Poet has all along taken the proper Methods of raising his Diction, by diversifying it with frequent Metaphors, and by borrowing from our ancient Poets both their *Words* and *Syntax* or Modes of Phrase ; as in the following Passages

——— *My Youth and Vigour*
Atchiev'd full many a Feat of martial Prowess—
Nor was my Skill in Chivalry unnoted
In the fair Volume of my Sovereign's Love. —
The Saws of Druids, or the Chaunt of Bards,
Have little Weight with me ———

——— *not from a partial Blindness,*
Or for the Mode and Guise of Curtesy,
Are we thus large in Praise —

And presently after,
Beshrew my Heart, my Lord, but this is strange.
As likewise this,

I have

——— *I have known the time,
When this good Arm had hardihood enough
For thrice his Prowess*———

Here you have a Grecism,

*What can a Man, that thinks such thoughts, as
I do,
Have Pow'r of Act, and Motion?*

At the same time, that our Poet has deviated from the ordinary Ways, and common Roads of Expression, he has kept altogether clear of that Rock, which his brother Tragedians have been known to split upon, *Æschylus* and *Shakespeare* frequently, sometimes *Euripides*, and *Sophocles*: I need not tell you, that I mean the false sublime, the *παρὰ πρᾶγματος*, or Bombast. There is one Expression in his Poem, which I know has been objected to as tending that way; where he talks of the *Lark, riding the Sun-beam*: But, I think, it is fairly justifiable, and will not appear harsh, if a little consider'd. Poets speaking of *flying* have borrow'd their Metaphors from the *Water*: Thus *Virgil* makes no scruple of saying *Remigio Alarum*: Why should not then a Poet borrow likewise a Metaphor on the like occasion from *Land*? And indeed we find *Euripides* has taken this Liberty, and boldly says,

Ζεφύρου πνοαῖς Ἰππεύσαντος

Ἐν οὐρανῷ

Phœniss. ver. 221,

Here *Euripides* *Zephyrus*, you see, *rides the Æther*; which, I think, will justify Mr. *Mason's* *Lark* for doing the same. But it may be said, this Passage of the *Greek* Poet occurs in the *Chorus* Part, to which several Liberties of Expression

Expression are indulged, which yet are not allow'd to the more sober Dialogue. Well, — but *Virgil* too, that very correct and chaste'd Writer in every respect, who takes fewer Liberties than any one, ventures to ascribe *riding* to his *Eurus*,

—— *Zephyrusque, Notusque, & lætus Eois*
Eurus Equis. ————— *Æn.* 2.

As for the Expression of the *Sun-beam*, that may easily be allow'd to be us'd for the *Æther enlighten'd* by it.

I have said enough, I think, on the Head of *Expression*, to make you sensible of our Author's Excellence in that respect. I shall now consider his *harmonious Versification*: This is a Beauty, which more particularly displays itself in his Odes; tho' in the whole Course of the Poem, it is all along so very observable, that it is needless to produce any particular Instance of it.

In general, you know, this is an Excellence, which is attain'd principally by these two Things; by varying the *Cæsura*, on all ordinary Occasions, as in Narrative, &c. and by adapting the Cadence to the Subject, what *Pope* calls making *the Sound an Echo to the Sense*, on particular Occasions, as in descriptive. The first of these, *i. e.* the judicious Management of the *Cæsura* (which is the grand Secret and Art of Verse; and which, of all Poets that I am acquainted with, *Virgil* and *John Philips*, Author of the *Cyder*, seem to have best understood) is what our Poet too has admirably succeeded in.

It is worth while, to consider the Nature of the *Cæsura* a little. That you may manifestly see,

see, what a material Difference this varying the Pause makes in the Harmony of Numbers, do but observe the run of these known Lines in *Orway*, where *Chamont* speaks of the Witch he met.

*Labour not to be justified too fast |
Hear all | and then let Reason hold the Scale |
What follows was the Riddle that confounds me |
Thro' a close Lane as I pursued my journey |
And meditated on the last Night's Vision |
I spied a wrinkled Hag | with Age grown double |
Picking dry Sticks | and mumbling to herself |
Her Eyes with scalding Rheum were gall'd and
wither'd |*

*And on her crooked Shoulders she had wrapt
The tatter'd remnant of an old strip'd hanging |
Which serv'd to keep her Carcase from the Cold |
So there was nothing of a Piece about her |*

Or here take and scan another famous Passage from the same Author's *Venice Preserv'd* —
Pierre to Jaffier in the first Act —

*I pass'd this very Moment by thy Doors |
And found them guarded by a Troop of Villains |
The Sons of publick Rapine were destroying |
They told me | by the Sentence of the Law |
They had Commission to seize all thy Fortune |
Nay more, Priuli's cruel Hand had sign'd it |
Here stood a Russian with a horrid Face |
Lording it o'er a Pile of massy Plate |
Tumbled into a Heap for public Sale |
There was another making villainous Jest |
At thy undoing |*

You must perceive certainly something very heavy, clogging and highly disagreeable to your Ear in the Verification of both these Passages; something that much offends the *judicium Aurium*

rium superbissimum. The case is, you have a Number of Verses together all paus'd exactly in the same Place at the End of the Line, except one; with scarce any Pause or Rest at all in the Middle of any of them: A thing however, which *Boileau*, and every one that has an Ear, will expect from a Writer that calls himself a Poet. *Boileau's* Words are,

———— *Le sens coupant les mots,
Suspende l'Hemistiche, en marque le repos.*

L'Art Poet. Chant. 1.

This is the grand Fault of *Spenser's* Versification, which you have often heard me express my dislike of.

Now see whether this Monotony, or Sameness of Cadence, which I complain so much of in the foregoing Verses, is so offensive to the Ear in our Poet's Story of *Matilda*, as told by *Athelwold* to *Elfrida* ———

———— *Late, very late |
Smit casually with young Matilda's Face |
He straight commanded her reluctant Mother
To yield her to his Arms | nor had she scap'd
The violating Fervor of his Love |
Had not the prudent Dame suborn'd her Handmaid
To take the unchaste Office | and be led
Veil'd in the Mask of Night | to Edgar's Chamber |
A counterfeit Matilda | As it chanc'd |
The Damsel pleas'd the King | nor did Detestation
A whit abate his Fondness | he forgave
The prudent Mother | eas'd Matilda's Fears |
And led the wanton Minstrel to his Court |
Where still she shares — |*

Compare these Lines of *Mr. Mason* with those of *Osway*, and you must find that, in point of *Harmony*, they as far excel them, as a dozen
of

of *Virgil's* Verses do a dozen of the detach'd sententious Lines of *P. Syrus*. And why are they more tuneable and musical, but merely on account of the artful Variation of his Cadence in almost every Line? That you may be farther sensible that Mr. *Mason* is a perfect Master of this Art, do but declaim to yourself *Orgar's* first Speech, his feigned Tale to the Chorus, *Athelwold's* Account to *Elfrida* of his deceiving *Edgar*, *Edwin's* Relation of *Athelwold's* Death, or in short any Speech consisting of eight or ten Lines.

In the second Art of Verse likewise, the conforming the sound to the Sense, our Author is equally happy. Witness that Line expressing the Flight of an Owl,

And sails on slow Wing thro' the cloister'd Isles —

And that on the heavy and tedious Prolongation of Time arising from an impatient Uneasiness,

How have these three dull Hours crept languid on!

That of the Approach of a galloping Horse,

The Fleet Hoof rattles o'er the flinty Plain —

But there is no Line, not only in the Poem before us, but in any Poem that I have ever read, which I more admire for that Excellence, which I am speaking of, than this,

More Streams slow-wand'ring thro' her winding Vales.

Having now consider'd our Author's *Fable*, the *Disposition* and Contexture of his Piece, his *Sentiments*, *Diction* and *Versification*, given you my Thoughts on each, and pointed out, as well

as I could, the Beauties of each severally, I look on myself as having discharg'd the Promise, which I made you. However you may expect to hear from me once more on this Subject, as I intend to give you one more Letter, wherein I purpose to run over the whole Poem together, and say a Word or two farther on some Things, which I may have omitted hitherto to speak of.



LETTER V.

I promis'd in my last to go regularly through the whole Piece, and take notice of what occurs most remarkable in the course of it. In the very opening of it there is something particularly agreeable: I like his not entering abruptly on his Subject, but with that easy Transition sliding into, and dropping upon it.

I should guess,

*If e'er Content deign'd visit mortal Clime,
This was her Place of dearest Residence.*

Grant Heav'n! I find it such. 'Tis now, &c. —

The Prologue, or Exordium runs off in all the easy Simplicity of Narrative: And in this our Author has here happily imitated his Masters the *Greeks*; who always take care, the first Thing they do, to make the Audience acquainted with as much of the Story, as is then necessary for them to be informed of; and never keep 'em in the dark, as sometimes our Play-writers

writers are pleas'd to deal with us almost through the first Act. The Absurdity of this Proceeding with an Audience the Ancients were too sensible of to be ever guilty of it; as we find likewise one of the most judicious Writers among the Moderns is equally an Enemy to it: His Words are well worth quoting,

*Que dès les premiers vers l'Action préparée,
Sans peine, du Sujet applanisse l'entrée.
Je me ris d'un Acteur, qui lent à s'exprimer,
De ce qu'il veut, d'abord ne sçait pas m'informer,
Et qui debrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
D'un divertissement me fait une fatigue.
J'aimerois mieux encor qu'il declinât son nom,
Et dît: "Je suis Oreste, ou bien Agamemnon,"
Que d'aller par un tas de confuses merveilles,
Sans rien dire à l'esprit, étourdir les oreilles.
Le Sujet n'est jamais assez tôt expliqué.*

Boil. l'Art. Poet. Chant. 3.

Our Author has too much Sense, not to be aware of this, and accordingly lets us into his Subject immediately. In this then he has imitated the *Greeks*; but in another thing he has somewhat deviated from, and indeed, as I think, excell'd them in his Prologue. Theirs is generally merely narrative, simply explanatory of the Subject, and *dispassionate* throughout. Our Exordium rises regularly and gradually from Narration to Passion, so as not only to engage, but quicken the Attention of the Audience, and by stirring a little their Passions now, to prepare them for that Agitation, which they are to be put into afterwards. Therefore we find *Orgar* expressing himself with warmth,

—— Haply this *Atbelwold*
May have espous'd some other. 'Sdeath be durst not.

—— If he has ——
This aged Arm is not so much unstrung
By slack'ning Years, but just Revenge will brace it.
 But hark! we come to the Ode of the Chorus,

—— *The Sound of sweetest Minstrelsy*
Breaks on my Ear ——

Supposing (as I said before) that the Interludes of the Chorus were not utterly and indispensably necessary to the continuation of the Drama, and highly serviceable and conducive to the Preservation of the Unities of *Time* and *Place*; yet they are certainly such beautiful Performances considered merely as Odes, that the Piece gains a very considerable Advantage, and additional Ornament by the Insertion of them. They are all of them drawn up, as choric Interludes, according to *Horace's* Direction.

Neu quid medios intercinat Actus,
Quod non proposito conducatur, & hæreat aptè ——

and as Odes, in a most excellent lyric Taste. This is a Species of Writing in which the *English* have not much succeeded. It seems in general too sprightly for the sober Genius of the *English* Muse. Accordingly, if you except *Dryden's Alexander's Feast*, with two or three Odes of Dr. *Akinside's* and Mr. *Grey's*, we have hardly, I believe, any that deserve that Name, besides those which Mr. *Mason* has given us in this Poem, and one of his to a Water-Nymph. *Cowley* indeed wrote much in the Measure, but little in the Taste of Lyric: And Mr. *Pope's* Ode on St. *Cecilia's* Day is by no means one of the
 the

the finest Productions of his Pen. Dr. *Trap* has in his Prælections talk'd of Mr. *Edmund Smith*, and *Hannes*, as excellent in that Species of Poetry : But really I must humbly confess I cannot help being of Opinion that their best Pieces, if judged of and measured by the Standard of *Horace* (who undoubtedly is the best and only Model for *Latin* Lyric Writing) appear but very indifferent. The Doctor might, I think, with more Propriety have mention'd *John Philips*, who manifestly shows, though he has unluckily for us left but one Ode behind him, that he could well handle the Lyre, and knew how to transfuse the true and genuine Spirit of *Horace* into his own Performances of that Nature. Mr. *Mason's* Odes then we must look on as a good Addition to the scanty Stock, which we before had, of lyric Poetry.

The Subject of the first Ode, which the Virgins sing, is naturally taken from the *Time* and *Place*, in which they now first appear, and is a fine Hymn to the Morning. The colouring of Expression (as I have observ'd) is more particularly heighten'd in all his choral Songs ; as it is very remarkably in this first. It deserves to be quoted at length (as indeed all of them do) but as that would not well come within the Bounds of a Letter, I shall only produce the most luminous Parts from these glaring Pieces. For one of which take the following.

*Away, ye Goblins all,
Wont the bewilder'd Traveller to daunt ;
Whose vagrant Feet have trac'd your secret Haunt
Beside some lonely Wall,
Or shatter'd Ruin of a moss-grown Tow'r,
Where at pale Midnight's stillest Hour,*

*Thro' each rough Chink the solemn Orb of Night
Pours momentary Gleams of trembling Light.*

It may not be disagreeable to you to see a fine Passage in *Shakespear*, to which possibly Mr. *Mason* had an Eye, when he wrote the foregoing Stanza.

— *Yonder shines Aurora's Harbinger ;
At whose approach, Ghosts wand'ring here and there
Troop home to Church-yards ; damned Spirits all,
That in Cross-ways and Floods have burial,
Already to their wormy Beds are gone ;
For fear lest Day should look their Shames upon ;
They wilfully exile themselves from Light ;
And must for aye consort with black-brow'd Night.*
Midsummer Night's Dream.

The following Dialogue between the Chorus and *Orgar* is finely carried on, and consider'd as Poetry is as beautiful a Piece of Composition, and as finish'd, as any in this, I had almost said any Poem : There is an agreeable melancholy Air in the whole Turn of *Orgar's* Stories ; and the sympathetic Tenderness of the Chorus is exquisitely touch'd ; in that Part particularly where the Virgins say, that they themselves are as much to be pitied, for not having it in their Power to relieve an Object of Compassion, as the pitiable Object itself is ; you shall have his Words,

*We pity and condole thy wretched State,
But we can do no more ; which on thy Part
Claims just returns of Pity : For whose Lot
Demands it more than theirs, whom Fate forbids
To taste the Joys of courteous Charity ;
To wipe the trickling Tears, which dew the Cheek
Of*

*Of palsied Age; to smooth its furrow'd Brow,
And pay its grey Hairs each due Reverence?*

A Sentiment this as unexpected and uncommon, as it is just and fine; which we all know, is the true Character and Stamp of genuine good writing.

Elfrida's Behaviour in her first Conference with the Chorus is particularly tender, soft and womanish: Her several little Doubts, Scruples and timorous Jealousies are set forth in a masterly Manner. What can be more so, than this Speech?

*Courts throng with Beauties, and my Athelwold
Has a soft, susceptible Heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry sparkling Eye,
As is the Musk-rose to dispense its fragrance
To ev'ry whisp'ring Breeze; perhaps he's false,
Perhaps Elfrida's wretched ———*

You will observe, on occasion of this Simile of the Musk-rose (as you may too on the Lines immediately following, where the Chorus compares Jealousy to Ivy, and on several not only Descriptions, but Similes and Allusions in the Poem) that these several rural Images are not affectedly brought in (as the Author expresses himself) from the Store-house of a picturesque Imagination, but naturally arise from the Scenery of the Place itself, and are introduc'd with the utmost Propriety. As the Ideas of these Actresses are suppos'd to be chiefly conversant about rural Matters, their Thoughts of course take a Tincture from Woods, Rivers and Fields, which accordingly discovers itself in their Discourse. Thus how beautiful does the following Simile

pppear, which otherwise might seem odd and out of the way! That the Hours wing'd with Music,

*skim thro' their diurnal round
Swift as the Swallow circles.*

How charmingly imag'd is the Complaint of Elfrida!

————— *why am I
Here shrouded up, like the pale Votarist,
Who knows no Visitant, save the lone Owl,
That leaves his Ivy-crested Battlement,
And sails on slow Wing thro' the cloister'd Isles,
Lift'ning her saintly Orisons?*

The Speech, which the Chorus makes in answer to the above Complaint, is so fine, that I cannot forbear transcribing the whole of it.

*Covet not that; the noblest Proof of Love
That Athelwold can give, is still to guard
Your tender Beauties from the blasting Taint
Of courtly Gales. The delicate soft Tints
Of snowy Innocence, the crimson Glow
Of blushing Modesty, there both fly off
And leave the faded Face no nobler Boast
Than well-rang'd lifeless Features. Ah, Elfrida,
Should you be doom'd, which happier Fate forbid!
To drag your Hours through all that nauseous Scene
Of Pageantry and Vice, your purer Breast,
True to its virtuous Relish, soon would heave
A fervent Sigh for Innocence and Harewood.*

The Ode which follows, to Content, is fill'd with a Redundancy of Imagination, and ornamented with all the Graces of Poetry. It is written too (according to my Idea of good Lyric) quite in the lyric Strain; it begins, in a
Manner

Manner apparently wild, with something seemingly strange and foreign, and yet it is wound round in such a Manner, as to be brought close to his Purpose.

*Sweet Bird! like thine our Lay shall flow,
Nor gaily loud, nor sadly slow;
For to thy note sedate and clear
Content still lends a list'ning Ear.
Reclin'd this mossy Bank along,
Oft has she heard thy easy Song:
Why hears not now?*

You see how artfully he brings it about to his Subject. The Attitude, in which he has painted *Content*, is inexpressibly amusing to the Imagination; which too must be highly entertain'd with the remaining Part of the Ode.

We have now *Athelwold* and *Elfrida* before us. After his warm and rapturous Address to *Elfrida*, how sweet is hers to *Athelwold*?

————— *Athelwold,*
*I had prepar'd me many a stern Rebuke;
Had arm'd my Brow with Frowns, and taught
my Eye
Th' averted Glance of Coldness, which might best
Greet such a loitering Lover; but I find,
'Twas a vain Task; for this my truant Heart
Forgets each Lesson, which Resentment taught,
And in thy Sight knows only to be happy.*

Athelwold's inward compunction and generous Remorse cannot be too much admir'd; as likewise his Alarm and Confusion upon *Elfrida's* proposing to attend him to Court; particularly the Reason, that he gives for it, which is, I think, the most delicate trait in the whole Poem.

————— Go to the clear Surface
Of yon unruffled Lake, and bending o'er it,
There read my Answer —————

Elfrida.

These are Riddles, Sir —

Athelwold.

*No: For its glassy and reflecting Surface
Will smile with Charms too tempting for a Palace.*

This affords him a pretty Opportunity of interweaving, and enriching his Story with that of *Matilda*, as it occurs in the Annals of *Edgar's* Reign.

Athelwold, being thunder-struck with *Edwin's* Account of the Approach of *Edgar*, is finely represented, with a consistent Generosity of Soul, as more solicitous about his Character than Safety, in that affecting *Apostrophe* to *Edwin*.

O *Edwin*, *Edwin*, when surviving Malice
Shall prey upon the Fame of thy dead Master,
Wilt thou not somewhat strive to check the Fiend's
Insatiate Fury? Wilt thou see my Name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with detraction's Venom,
And bear it patiently?

Athelwold's Discovery of the whole Intrigue to *Elfrida*, is one of the completest Pieces of poetic Narrative in the dramatic Way, that I know of. The Versification of it I have taken notice of before. *Elfrida's* Behaviour immediately upon it is truly admirable and masterly.

When you read the following Lines of the Chorus, you will, doubtless, apply to them the Observation, which I made above, of our Sentiments

timents taking a tincture from the Objects which surround us.

——— *Indeed, ye constant Pair,
'Tis fit ye strive to fly the coming Danger.
For Safety now fits wav'ring on your Love,
Like the Light down upon the Thistle's Beard
Which ev'ry Breeze may part.*

The same may be said of *Elfrida's* Device, of staining and disguising her Complexion with certain Leaves or Berries.

When, upon *Edgar's* nearer Approach, *Edwin* advises his Lord to give him Meeting, you will be in love with the Earl's Ingenuity and Generosity ; who thus answers *Edwin*,

——— *Give him meeting, Edwin !
Alas, I have no Mask to veil my Baseness.
When deep Contrition shadows all my Soul,
I cannot dress my Features in light Smiles,
And look the Thing I am not. No, these Eyes
Are not as yet true Vassals to my Purpose,
As yet indeed I am but half a Villain —*

Who likewise upon *Elfrida's* palliating his treachery by alledging, it was but the Crime of Love, proceeds to answer her thus.

——— *Millions have broke
That Faith for Beauty : And if Beauty's Beam
Could blanch the Stains of Falshood, that bright
Glance
Would change the ebon Darkness of my Crime
To whitest Innocence. But, Oh ! it cannot.
Ev'n while I gaze upon it, Conscience tells me
I ought not to have wrong'd the best of Masters —*

The

The Chorus' Approbation of *Elfrida's* Behaviour is expressed in such a Manner, that I cannot help producing the Passage.

*'Tis a bright Prodigy, which Admiration
Must stand in silent Gaze at, and behold
Full-plum'd Perfection take its eagle Flight
Above Ambition, Sov'reignty, and Pride;
Above ———*

On account of the steady Attachment to her Lord, which *Elfrida* had shewn in the foregoing Scene, while she is now employ'd in gathering that Flower with which she intends to disguise her Look, the choral Virgins take Occasion to sing an Interlude in Praise of *Constancy*. The whole turn of the Ode is truly in the Spirit of Lyric. There is an agreeable regular Disorder in it. The Digression on the invariable stated Succession of the Seasons is entirely poetical, and perfectly agreeable to the Genius of lyric Writing. The Mountain of Virtue, and the several Streams belonging to it, are conceiv'd with great Pregnancy of Invention. We have here an Instance of that *sublime Allegory*, and *pure Poetry*, which Mr. *Mason* observes the Chorus gives a Tragedian an opportunity of introducing into his Poem. In the Passage before us (according to *Shakespear*)

*The Poet's Eye in a fine Phrenzy rolling
Doth glance from Heav'n to Earth, from Earth
to Heav'n;*

And, as Imagination bodies forth

*The Forms of Things unknown, the Poet's Pen
Turns them to Shape, and gives to aery Nothing
A local Habitation, and a Name ———*

Thus

Thus we see *Constancy* here embodied, with a local Habitation and Name, by the creative Power of pure Poetry. You will be pleased to see what Sir *Philip Sidney* says on this Subject of exceeding the Bounds of Nature. He has been speaking of the Name, which the *Greeks* gave a Poet [*ποιητής*] who accordingly is, as that Term imports, a *Maker*, one that raises a Creation of his own. *The Philosopher* (says he) the *Historian*, *Rhetorician*, &c. build upon Nature. Only the Poet disdaining to be tied to any such Subjection, lifted up with the Vigour of his own Invention, doth grow in effect into another Nature: in making things, either better than Nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature — so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not inclosed within the narrow Warrant of her Gifts, but freely ranging within the Zodiac of his own Wit. There is then a distant World of Poetry's own creating,

——— *jacet extra sidera tellus*
Extra Anni Solisque vias,

where, according to *Longinus*, τοὺς τοῦ περιέχοντος ὅρου ἐκβαίνουσι πολλάκις αἱ ἐπίνοιαι, the Imagination expatiates beyond the Limits of this visible World. Here it is, that the Poets have planted an imaginary Colony: The human *Virtues*, *Vices*, *Passions*, and *Accidents*, &c. they have made *Persons*, by that means qualifying them for Inhabitants and Denizens of this Region. From this World it is, that Mr. *Mason* makes *Constancy* now descend. I have said the more on this Head, because there are some Critics, and those eminent ones, who dislike

dislike this *personifying Allegory*; which however I can't help thinking is strictly agreeable to the Spirit of pure Poetry; tho' it may be pushed so far as to be utterly absurd, as it is in *Ariosto's Discord*; who, in one Place, is represented in a ridiculous Manner as receiving bodily Chastisement from the Hands of an Angel, for neglect of some former Injunctions.

*The Angel takes her by her painted Locks,
And with great Fury gives her many Knocks.*

*He brake a crosses Handle on her Crowne,
And grievously doth beat her, Back and Side;
The Wretch upon her Marybones falls downe,
At th' Angels Feet, and Mercie, Mercie cride:
Pacce to the Pagans then, that siege yon Towne
(Quoth he) and see, that you among them bide;
For if this Place againe thou ever trouble,
Assure thyself thy Payment shall be double.*

*Though Discord's Back and Arms were sore with
beating,
Yet thence with all the hast she could she went,
Terrified with that mighty Angels threat'ning,
Doubting again in like sort to be shent:
Yet in this hast, behind her not forgetting
Bellows and Coles, instead of those were spent,
By which in many Minds, and Hearts invincible,
She quickly kindle might a fire inquenchible.*

Orlando Furioso transl. by Harrington,
Booke xxvii.

I have given myself the Trouble of transcribing the Passage at length merely to divert you; and certainly at the quaintness of it not to laugh,

laugh, exceeds all Power of Face. At the same time it must give you a higher Relish for Mr. Mason's Lines on Constancy. To proceed in our Poem.

We see *Elfrida* now re-appearing on the Stage, sweetly moralizing over the Flower, which she has just gathered, in some very beautiful Lines, which I have quoted before: where the Poet seems to have in view that Scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, where *Frier Lawrence* comes with a Basket of Herbs and Flowers, and takes Occasion to make some moral Remarks much in the same Manner,

*Within the infant Rind of this small Flower
Poison hath Residence, &c. ———*

There is something extremely agreeable in reflecting thus on Nature and her various Productions; what *Shakespeare* calls, *apprehending thus, and drawing a Profit from all Things we see*, in that beautiful Scene of *Cymbeline*, where in this very manner the rustic Moralist old *Belarius* is instructing and catechizing his two Sons in the Book of Nature. This is finding

*Tongues in Trees, Books in the running Brooks,
Sermons in Stones, and good in every thing.*

The Characters of *Elfrida* and *Orgar*, are excellently supported throughout this Dialogue. The Chorus' Advice to *Orgar*, dissuading him from all Thoughts of Revenge, which I have given you at length before, cannot be enough admir'd.

The short Interlude of the Chorus, in that critical Instant just before the unravelling of the
Plot

Plot and discovery to *Edgar*, is a masterly Imitation of the strong and figurative Style of the *Greek Chorus* on the like Occasions.

Horror! Horror!

*The Pen of Fate dipt in its deepest Gall,
Perhaps on that ill-omen'd Wall
Now writes th' Event of this tremendous Day.
O! that our weaker Sight
Could read the mystic Characters, and spy
What to the unpurg'd mortal Eye,
Is hid in endless Night.*

Suspense! thou frozen Guest, &c. —

The Address of *Edgar*, now first appearing, to *Athelwold* and to the choral Virgins, is drawn in a very sprightly Manner, and well bespeaks the courteous and gallant young Prince: *Orgar's* unexpected Appearance finely heightens *Athelwold's* Distress, immediately concluding, that *Elfrida* had betray'd him. *Orgar's* Character is maintained with great Spirit in *Athelwold's* Accusation; particularly in that Part, where the Prince having told him that

Dotage alone could frame the Accusation —

he replies,

*I do not dote, thank Heav'n, my Faculties
Are yet my own, unblemish'd and unhurt.
—— Would so my Daughter were!*

When *Athelwold* comes to know from the Chorus, how *Orgar* was let into the Secret, there

there is something inexpressibly moving in his Answer to the Virgins,

*I blame ye not ; it was the Work of Fate.
Fate brought him hither, Fate annull'd your Faith.
I do not think you purpos'd my Destruction,
But yet you have destroy'd me —*

which must bring to your Mind that Passage in the Æneid, where poor old Evander, in his Lamentation over his Son, after having express'd some Sorrow for having entered into Alliance with the Trojans, and sent his Son to join them, says with a very affecting turn, “ I “ would not however mean to accuse ye, Tro- “ jans, &c. it is all the Work of Fate.

*Nec vos arguerim, Teucric, nec fœdera, nec quas
Junximus hospitio dextras ; fors ista senectæ
Debita erat nostræ.* ÆN. II.

The manner in which *Atbelwold* goes on in the same Speech is very masterly.

————— O Elfrida,
*And art thou faithful ? This my jealous Eye
Thought it had mark'd some Speck of Change upon
thee ;
Thought it had found, what might have made thy
loss
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not so ;
And this thy Purity but serves t'augment
The Sum of my Distractions —*

D

This

This Thought of *Atbelwold* is natural and just, though not obvious, which, as I said before, is the surest Mark and Character of good Writing.

We come now to the Choral Ode on Truth, which is so excellent a Piece of Poetry, that I can hardly forbear giving it a Place at length in my Paper. It is filled both with truly *rational*, and *magnificent* Ideas: The happy Combination of which restores Poetry to its original Dignity. In this moral Lyric we find Mr. Mason that true "*popular Philosopher* (that Sir "*Philip Sidney* speaks of) *who giveth moral Precepts and natural Problems, and cometh to you with Words set in delightful Proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for the well incanting Skill of Music.*" His Moral is not only sound, but shining; not only substantially good as from the School of Plato, but *trimm'd in all the gorgeous Eloquence of Pindar*. In this Ode I can't help taking more particular notice of the following Passage,

*So Truth proclaims: her awful Voice I hear,
With many a solemn Pause it slowly meets my Ear.*

This latter Verse is, I think, an extraordinary Instance of excellent Versification; but there is a more material Excellence in it, as it conveys in a very poetical Manner this Sentiment; namely, *that Truth does not discover itself to the Mind without much Consideration and sober Reasoning, many a solemn Pause, much steady Contemplation.* There is something uncommonly sublime

sublime in the Thought of the latter half of this Ode, which is conceiv'd altogether in the Spirit of *Milton*. Bring me a Passage from any Lyric to equal this on the Beauty of Truth.

*Shall then your Earth-born Daughters vie
With me ? &c. &c. —*

*Shall she be deem'd my Rival ? Shall a Form
Of elemental Dross, of mould'ring Clay,
Vie with these Charms imperial ? The poor Worm
Shall prove her Contest vain. Life's little Day
Shall pass, and she is gone : while I appear,
Flush'd with the Bloom of Youth thro' Heav'n's
eternal Year.*

Or what follows on her eternal co-existence with the Almighty,

*Know, Mortals, know ; ere first ye sprung,
Ere first these Orbs in Æther hung,
I shone amid the heav'nly Throng.
These Eyes beheld Creation's Day,
This Voice began the choral Lay,
And taught Archangels their triumphant Song, &c.*

I need not point out to you the peculiar Majesty of the last Line.

*Thus the Almighty spake : he spake, and call'd me
Truth.*

The several Signs of Remorse, Generosity, and Love are finely mark'd out in *Abelwold's* Behaviour in the following Act : And the

Chorus no where appears with greater Dignity. What can be more grand and striking than their Dissuasive from *Suicide*, which I have mentioned before? The Banner of Providence is new, and display'd with the utmost Stretch of Fancy. Who can behold *Atbelwold*, extended upon the Earth, bewailing his treachery, cover'd with an honest shame, and wishing for Death, without being touch'd with his Distress?

O Earth, cold Earth,
Upon whose Breast I cast this load of Mis'ry,
Bear it awhile; and you, ye aged Oaks,
Ye venerable Fathers of this Wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching Shade
My humble Ancestors, oft seen them hie
To your spread Umbrage, from yon sultry Field,
Their Scene of honest Labour, shade, Ah! shade
The last, the wretchedest of all their Race.
I will not long pollute ye, for I mean
To pay beneath your consecrated Gloom
A Sacrifice to honour, and the Ghosts
Of those Progenitors, who sternly frown
On me their base Descendant —

You must, I am sure, be very much pleas'd with *Elfrida's* affectionate and importunate intercession with *Edgar* for her sentenced Lord in the next Scene; as with *Edgar's* Behaviour, who in the midst of his calm and courteous Address to *Elfrida*, is fir'd suddenly with Love and Indignation, which he expresses in the following Apostrophe to *Atbelwold*.

Traitor!

*Traitor! was this the Face which thy false
Tongue*

*Prophan'd as vulgar? this such common Beauty
As the fair Eye of Day beheld each Hour
In ev'ry Clime he lighted? Base Dissembler,
This Instant quit our Realm.*

As presently afterwards,

— Nor 'till this Deed —

But such a Deed! look there, look on that Face.

You, who have heard and particularly remarked the Manner in which Garrick speaks these Words in *King Lear*, "*Cordelia shall be Queen*," will discover certainly a very great Beauty in those simple Words, in which *Elfrida* expresses her Rapturous and wild Joy on *Edgar's* relenting, "Virgins, the King will pardon him." There appears to me an extraordinary Beauty, in making *Elfrida*, in the overflowing of her Joy, not know, as it were, how to testify her warm acknowledgements and thanks to *Edgar*, but turn to the Chorus to express them.

You have now the inflexible, impetuous old Father, his passionate Pride getting the better of his Affection, with a churlish brutality spurning his suppliant and distressed Daughter,

Nay bang not on me, — &c.

and deaf to all the persuasive Eloquence of a Child's Tears.

Edwin's Relation of *Atbelwold's* Death is charmingly drawn up; in which the Behaviour of *Edgar*, challenging the Earl to the Combat, and of *Atbelwold* during the Combat not attempting his injur'd Monarch's Life, and purposely exposing his own, is equally admirable. The whole of *Elfrida's* Behaviour, after having received the fatal Account, is both uncommon and perfectly just, and consistent; hear what she says immediately upon having heard the shocking recital.

——— *I do not wish*

*The Tyrant's Hand may wither with cold palsies.
No, I am very patient. Heav'n is just!
And when the Measure of his Crimes is full,
Will bare its red right Arm, and launce its Light'n-
ings.*

*Till then, ye Elements, rest: and thou, firm
Earth,*

*Ope not thy yawning Jaws, but let this Monster
Stalk his due time on thine affrighted Surface.*

*Yes; let him still go on; still execute
His savage Purposes, and daily make
More Widows weep, as I do.*

The Poet's representing *Elfrida* as applying to her Father to avenge her Wrongs and *Atbelwold's* Death on *Edgar*, making her Grief absorb all other Considerations, and cloud her Memory so far as to make her mistake *Or-gar* for *Atbelwold's* Friend, are very masterly strokes.

The

The following moral Sentiment of the Semi-chorus is set in so beautiful a Light, that I must give you the Sight of it at length.

*As Truth directs,
So only shall we act. This Day has shewn
What dire Effects await its violation.
Strait is the Road of Truth and plain,
And tho' across the sacred Way
Ten thousand false Meanders stray,
'Tis ours to walk direct,
And, with sage caution circumspect,
Pace slowly thro' the solemn Scene.*

I have taken notice before of the solemnity of those Lines, in which *Elfrida* makes her Vow. Nor is the Invocation of the Angels, which the Chorus makes, to ratify this her Vow, less awful and striking.

——— *Hear, Angels, bear,
Hear from these nether Thrones of Light;
And O in golden Characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal Word.
Then wing your solemn Flight
Up to the Heaven of Heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous Tablet high,
'Mid the dread Records of Eternity.*

In the Repetition of these Lines, the Poet seems particularly to have had in View the frequent Repetition of the last Choral Hymn in the *Pastor Fido*; where, *Mirtillo* and *Amarillis* being conducted in a kind of Triumph to their Nuptials,

the Scene both opens, and closes in the same Manner with the Song,

*Vieni santo Hymenæo,
Seconda i nostri voti, &c.
Stringi il nodo fatal, santo Hymenæo.*

The Repetition however in our *English* Poet is more beautiful, I think, than that in the *Italian*; since the extraordinary Solemnity of *Elfrida's* Vow seems to require a stronger Confirmation, than the ordinary nuptial Solemnity in *Guarini*.

Since the Discovery of certain Blemishes generally makes part of Pieces of Criticism, you may perhaps expect me to produce a black List of such as I could descry. But I must own, I cannot find any: I can see no defect in the *Fable*, or *Characters*, none in the *Contexture of the Piece*, none in the *Sentiments*, *Diction* or *Verseification*. You will not be able, I believe, be you ever so vigilant or sharp-sighted, to catch him once nodding; which cannot be said of one *English* Writer in fifty.

And now, after all, will any one say, that by preserving *all the Unities*, and subjecting himself to the most scrupulous and strict Observance of the dramatic Rules, as laid down by the best Critics of Antiquity, will any one say that the Genius of our Poet is at all strait'ned or cramp'd? Are those Rules to be look'd on as harsh and galling Chains, and not rather as *ipsis ex vincula fertis*,

As

*As soft-wreath'd Bands of Flow'rs, which well
the Muse*

*Might wear for choice, not force; Obstruction
none,*

But loveliest ornament ?

Mafon's Musæus.

And, notwithstanding *Tasso's* Indictment laid against *Aristotle* (in *Boccalini*) for tyrannically imposing his restrictive Ordinances on Poets, what now, Sir, have you to say in Defence of them, *why Sentence should not pass* on all dramatic Writers, *to write according to Law ?*

The Preservation of the two Unities of *Place* and *Time* (which our Writers do most notoriously violate, and which the above-mentioned Laws of Criticism do insist on being as strictly observ'd, as the Unity of *Action*) you will think the more necessary and important, by duly considering the following Passage from Sir *Philip Sidney*, in which he in a humorous, and at the same time sensible Manner ridicules the absurd Breach of them. Speaking of *Gorboduck*, he says, " *it is faulty both in Place and Time, the*
" *two necessary Companions of all corporal Actions.*
" *For where the Stage should always represent*
" *but one Place ; and the uttermost time pre-*
" *supposed in it, should be both by Aristotle's Pre-*
" *cept, and common Reason, but one Day ; there*
" *is both many Days and many Places, inarti-*
" *ficially imagin'd. But if it be so in Gorboduck,*
" *how much more in all the rest, where*
" *you shall have Asia on the one Side, and Africa*
" *on the other, and so many other under*
" *Kingdoms, that the Player when he comes in,*
" *must ever begin with telling where he is, or*
" *else*

" else the Tale will not be conceived. Now you
 " shall have three Ladies walk to gather Flowers,
 " and then we must believe the Stage to be a
 " Garden. By and by we hear News of Ship-
 " wreck in the same Place, then we are to blame
 " if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the
 " back of that comes out a hideous Monster with
 " Fire and Smoke, and then the miserable Be-
 " holders are bound to take it for a Cave: While
 " in the mean time two Armies fly in, represent-
 " ed by four Swords and Bucklers, and then
 " what hard Heart will not receive it for a pitch-
 " ed Field?

" Now of time they are much more liberal.
 " For ordinary it is, that two young Princes fall
 " in love, after many traverses she is got with
 " Child, delivered of a fair Boy: He is lost,
 " groweth a Man, falleth in love, and is ready
 " to get another Child; and all this in two Hours
 " Space: which how absurd it is in Sense, even
 " Sense may imagine: and Art bath taught, and
 " all ancient Examples justified, and at this Day
 " the ordinary Players in Italy will not err in
 " it." These glaring Absurdities now are ef-
 " fectually obviated and removed by the sole In-
 " troduction of the Chorus; as is likewise that
 " unnatural Practice of Soliloquies effectually pro-
 " vided against at the same time.

The old dramatic Plan, you may say, is
 indeed the most rational and excellent: but the
 general Palate is not found to relish that real
 Excellence. Well, what then? Is a good Wri-
 ter to conform to the vitiated Taste of the World,
 or to the sound Rules of good Sense and Cri-
 ticism? Is he meanly to comply with what he
 knows

knows are Corruptions, and not rather boldly attempt to reform 'em? There is nothing (as Lord *Shaftsbury* well observes) more certain, than that a *real Genius*, and *thorow Artist*, in whatever kind, can never without the utmost Reluctance and Shame be brought to act below his Character, and *for mere Interest* be prevail'd with to prostitute his Art and Science, by performing contrary to its known Rules. This his Lordship instances in good Painters, Statuaries, and Architects; who had rather starve, than by a base Compliance with the Humour of the World, act contrary to the *Justness* and *Truth of Work*. *Raphael* would not have suffer'd his Pencil to have been misguided into any *irregularity* of Design or Colouring by the Authority of Pope *Leo* himself. When one considers (says the above-mention'd noble Author) this honest and faithful Zeal in inferior Artists, one would wonder to see those who pretend to Skill and Science in a higher kind, have so little regard to *Truth*, and the *Perfection of their Art*. One would expect it of our Writers, that if they had real Ability, they should draw the World to them, and not meanly sute themselves to, and follow the World in its debauch'd State. We may justly indeed make allowances for the Simplicity of those early Genius's of our Nation, who after so many barbarous Ages, when Letters lay yet in their Ruins, made bold Excursions into a vacant Field, to seize the Posts of Honor, and attain the Stations, which were yet unpossessed by the Wits of their own Country. And thus *Shakespear* may be fairly excus'd for writing to
the

the Populace, and directing his Endeavours solely to hit the Taste and Humour of the Age, in which it was his Misfortune to live: He was to write for his livelihood; and as for Rules of Composition, they were hardly so much as heard of then. But since the Age is now so far advanc'd; Learning establish'd; the Rules of Writing stated, and the Truth of Art so well apprehended, and every where confessed and owned; it is strange to see our Writers as unshapen still, and monstrous in their Works, as heretofore. There can be nothing more ridiculous, than to hear our Poets in their Prefaces talk of Art and Structure; whilst in their Pieces they perform as ill as ever, and almost with as little regard to those professed Rules of Art, as the honest Bards, their Predecessors, who had never heard of any such Rules, or at least had never owned their justice or validity.

Had the early Poets of *Greece* thus complimented their Nation, by complying with its first Relish and Appetite; they had not done their Countrymen such service, nor themselves such honor, as we find they did, by conforming to Truth and Nature. The generous Spirits who first essayed the Way, had not always the World on their Side: But soon drew after them the best Judgments; and soon afterwards the World itself. They forc'd their way into it, and by Weight of Merit turned its Judgment on their Side. They form'd their Audience; polish'd the Age; refin'd the publick Ear, and fram'd it right; that in return they might be rightly and lastingly applauded. Nor were they disappointed in their Hope. The Applause

plause came, and it was lasting, for it was found. They have justice done them at this Day. They have survived their Nation; and live though in a dead Language. The more the Age is enlightened, the more they shine. Their Fame must necessarily last as long, as Letters; and Posterity will ever own their Excellence.

And as Mr. *Mason* has boldly step'd aside out of the common Road and beaten Track of a base Compliance with the vulgar Taste, it is to be hoped that, as he has pursued the same Method and used the same *laudable Means*, he will attain likewise the same *glorious End* with them; and meet with that universal and lasting Applause, which is the just Recompence of such singular Merit.

If you have any Objections to make to whatever I have said in any Part of these Letters, I should be glad to hear them in your next, and in my Answer I would endeavour to give you all reasonable Satisfaction about them.

I am yours, &c.

F I N I S.



101

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